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## NOTE ON PSALMS 34 AND 25.

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It is a well-known fact that the text of the alphabetical psalms exhibits many corruptions. At first blush, this circumstance cannot but strike the student as exceedingly strange. On general principles, the contrary might easily be looked for. The alphabetical order might reasonably be expected to act as a protection against confusion; the sequence of the initial letters being fixed, little scope would appear to be given the carelessness of the scribes and copyists. Inspection of the alphabetical compositions, however, speedily corrects this impression. In proportion to their length, no other texts show so many curious departures from what must have been the original reading. While some of this class have escaped maltreatment at the hands of slovenly transcribers (Prov., chap. 30, and Lam., chaps. 1, 2), others have been so changed in the course of transcription as to render their original alphabetical character almost unrecognizable (Nahum, chap. 1). The reason for this is not difficult to establish. The mechanical plan of construction, chaining the pen to the sequence of the alphabet, interfered with the continuity of thought in the context. This difficulty was overcome only in rare cases. Absence of definite development of thought opened the door to the fancy of the copyists and correctors. In their memory there floated snatches of biblical verses and expressions that fitted in with the lines as well as those shown by the text to be copied. Moreover, letters of the alphabet could easily be skipped, if, as was the case with many of these alphabetical poems, the continuity of thought was not strongly marked. The omission of a line could not be at once detected if from one statement to the next succeeding the connection of thought was not of a nature to be intolerant of disruption. The mistake or omission might be discovered later, and this led to the attempt to insert the line which had dropped out in its proper place. This would easily give rise to misplacement, marginal additions as a rule failing by a later copyist to be

properly located. But in case a defective copy was left without correction, the omission naturally provoked a subsequent reader into supplying the gap in his own free way. It was not a matter of great difficulty to compose for this purpose a verse beginning with the required letter.

That most of the alphabetical psalms have suffered from this cause and in this way is shown by never so hasty an inspection. In fact, many of them have the appearance of being no more than loosely joined mosaics of biblical quotations and reminiscences. Ps. 33 certainly presents all the characteristics of a collection of phrases without underlying thought or purpose to connect one with the other. Duhm ("Die Psalmen," in Marti's *KHC.*) styles it "ein alphabetisierender" psalm, and bases this opinion upon the fact that the psalm has as many distichs as the alphabet has letters. No exception may be taken to this characterization, though one may go still farther than he, and, neglecting to take account of this correspondence in the number of the distichs with that of the letters of the alphabet, insist that the psalm really is nothing else than a collection of verses that probably formed part of other alphabetical poems, put together here in the manner of a copyist practicing his penmanship and drawing upon his memory. At all events, the impression is more than subjective that some of the verses are doubles. Vss. 13 and 14 admit of no other explanation.

It is admitted that the manuscripts of which our Massoretic text is a reproduction, or, to be more exact, from which the manuscript which is basic to our Massoretic text is descended, were written in columns. Many of the palpable transferences of words and passages from one chapter or psalm to a subsequent or preceding one are explicable only on the assumption that the eye of the transcriber inattentively passed from one column to the other, and thus inserted words or whole lines in wrong places. This seems to have occurred with greater frequency in the alphabetical psalms, for the reasons outlined above. The context afforded no protection against such mechanical accidents. In the case of Ps. 34 this theory seems to open the way for a few emendations that will remove difficulties noticed by almost every commentator.

Duhm calls attention to the general similarity of this psalm with Ps. 25. Both, as they now stand, are loose compositions

lacking progression of thought. The alphabetical succession of the initial letters seems to have been the principal preoccupation of the writer or writers, to the exclusion of a well-developed theme. Hence, while the general tenor of both is to speak of the providential protection which watches over the righteous (or the "humble" [Ps. 25]), the subject is handled in a very discursive way. Duhm inclines to the opinion that both psalms have the same author. Adopting a suggestion by de Lagarde, he finds his name in the concluding verses after the alphabetical lines. This discovery is very ingenious, but Ps. 34 requires only a few emendations to be recognized as a composition which attempts to develop a theme, and, moreover, the פ verse, which is held to indicate the common author's name, in Ps. 34 belongs to the body of the psalm, and was transferred to the end by a later hand for reasons easily detected.

Duhm also urges as a further proof of the identity of authorship the omission in both Pss. 25 and 34 of the Wav as an initial. In Ps. 25, however, this omission is clearly due to sloven carelessness and is remedied without violent straining of what is presented by the Massoretic text. The Septuagint reading וְאֵתֶּךָ suggests that the proper method of reconstructing the original reading, as Duhm himself admits, is to take וְאֵתֶּךָ as the beginning of the Wav distich and combine with it vs. 7b, כְּחֶסֶדְךָ זָכַר לִי אֱלֹהִים. Though this correction has the support of a Septuagint reading, the ו before such a construction is somewhat heavy. This objection is obviated by taking the preceding כִּי לִמְדֵנִי יְשׁוּעִי אֱלֹהִים out of vs. 5 and making it the beginning of the Wav distich. The other stichos is found, as suggested by Duhm, in vs. 7b: כְּחֶסֶדְךָ זָכַר לִי אֱלֹהִים. In case this is done, Bickell's, and after him Duhm's, transference of vs. 5c אֶתְּךָ קִיֵּיתִי to the Aleph distich is forestalled, and another complement for the Aleph verse must be suggested. The אֱלֹהִים, obviously out of place at the beginning, gives a ready cue. The second stichos began with this word, and part of its phraseology must have been similar to that occurring in vs. 2, in consequence of which the copyist must have been misled. If so, the second half of the Aleph distich could have been no other than the very familiar phrase אֱלֹהִים בְּךָ חֲסִיתִי. Loosely as Ps. 25 is joined together, its author nevertheless affects repetitions of this kind. One might even be justified, in view of this affectation, in holding

that instead of חסיתי the reading was בטחתי, repeated in vs. 2. Thought and verbal iterations abound in the psalm. See vs. 2, אבושה, and vs. 3, יבשן (twice); vs. 4, דרכיך, and vs. 5, הדריכני; vs. 6, זכר, and vs. 7, אל־תזכר; vs. 7, טובך, and vs. 8, טוב; vs. 8, בדרך, and vs. 9, ידרך. The reconstruction as proposed carries out, or at least harmonizes readily with, this predisposition toward repetitions. The ה distich will then read:

הדריכני באמתך  
אותך קייתי כל היום

which is followed by the Wav distich:

ולמדני כי אתה אלהי ישי  
בחסדך זכר לי [כי] אתה [אלהי]

כי and אלהי would, if supplied, relieve the somewhat unlooked for emphasis which אתה carries if the reading is accepted as transmitted. Moreover, the introduction of the כי, the dropping of which from the text is due to the preceding לי, would correspond with the construction of both the preceding and the following thought (כי מעולם המה).

At all events, it is *not* clear that the Wav distich was originally missing in Ps. 25. Nor is the analogy to Ps. 34, which Duhm invokes in support of his rejection of the Septuagint indication of a reading with Wav, beyond all doubt. A closer textual inspection of this psalm may perhaps lead to the rediscovery of the Wav distich.

Vs. 6 is the crucial passage. As it stands in the Massoretic text it presents several difficulties—the vocalization of the verbs as perfects in the first half, the אל in conjunction with the ופנייהם in the second. Following most of the ancient translations (with the exception of the Targum), modern interpreters have pointed the verbs as imperatives and changed ופנייהם into ופניכם. The emendation must be accepted if the present order of the lines is preserved. But perhaps the Massoretic vocalization is indicative of some other arrangement which was disturbed, owing to some such accident as described in the introduction to these notes. Vs. 6, I believe, was not the original ה distich. That is found in Ps. 33:18a. The idea therein expressed is certainly a more natural progression from that of 34:5 than vs. 6 in either its Massoretic pointing or that of the versions. “The

eye of Yahweh being upon those that fear him" accounts for the writer's personal experience. Ps. 33:18<sup>b</sup> would seem not to have originally belonged where it now stands. It is too short to complete the metrical swing. And, moreover, it adds no new shading to the proposition advanced in vs. 18<sup>a</sup>. Vs. 19<sup>a</sup> (in the manuscript written as the second half of vs. 18, but underneath) suggests itself readily as the required half of vs. 18. We would then have for the ה line in Ps. 34 this:

הנה עין יהוה אל (על) יראיו  
להציל ממוות נפשם

The addition in 33:19<sup>b</sup> **ברעב ולחיותם** has all the characteristic signs of an explanatory gloss (with reference maybe to 34:11), the glossator trying to tone down the theological difficulties he scented in the salvation from death, and as always mistaking poetry for prose, or, in this case, not recognizing the use of **נפש** as a substitute for the pronoun. Ps. 34:6 is now at our disposal for reconstructing the missing Wav distich. If the eyes of Yahweh are upon those that fear him to save them from death (at the hands of their enemies), they, the God-fearing, need indeed not blush or be ashamed. This would give us an unforced progression of thought. The word **ופניהם** may thus begin the next line. The **אל** is a misreading for **לא**, due to the proximity of the **אליו** in the other half of the distich. The Massoretic pointing can then stand. The order of vs. 6<sup>b</sup> and 6<sup>a</sup> need only be reversed, viz.:

ופניהם לא יחפרו  
תביטו אליו ונהרו

"Yea, their faces will not be put to the blush. They look up to Him (as soon as they look up to Him [perhaps read **אל יהוה**, which **אל** for **לא** in preceding line would corroborate] and) they (shall) flush with light." The inversion became imperative as soon as the original ה stichos was misplaced; but tradition retained the original pronunciation as perfects and the third person in the suffix of the noun. With this reading re-established the alphabet is complete also in Ps. 34.

Another difficulty or peculiarity in Ps. 34 may be removed by allowing the possibility that a phrase originally in Ps. 34 may have strayed into the collection of "odds and ends" now

numbered Ps. 33. Duhm notices that vs. 8 is flatly prosaic. The meter certainly is not complete. The prosy undernote is in the second (incomplete) stichos, in the text, of only one word, וִיחַלְצֵם. Turning to 33:18, one finds the phrase לְמִיחָלִים לְחַסְדּוֹ preceded by the identical word with which 34:8a ends, יִרְאִיו. This fact may explain the displacement. By adding to וִיחַלְצֵם, which is sufficiently like מִיחָלִים to have misled a slovenly transcriber, both the prosy flavor and the meter are corrected; and the ח distich will then be:

חֹנֶה (מֶלֶךְ) יְהוָה סָבִיב לִירְאָיו  
וִיחַלֵּץ (אֵת) הַמִּיחָלִים לְחַסְדּוֹ

The מֶלֶךְ may be a later correction in order to avoid the anthropomorphic implication. For the introduction of אֵת, which may be the cause of the ם in the Massoretic וִיחַלְצֵם, see Ps. 147:11.

It has been proposed to transpose vss. 17, 18, placing the פ before the ז. That this inverted order occurs in several of the alphabetical compositions is known. As the two verses now stand, the grammar of the ז distich (verb in third person plural), vs. 19, becomes very difficult. But this difficulty is lifted and the order of the alphabet restored if the second פ distich now found at the end of the psalm (vs. 23) is substituted for the first פ verse (vs. 18). This suggestion recommends itself in consideration of the fact that the whole psalm to the last (ח) verse ignores the evildoers. The construction פְּנִים־בִּ is also unusual. With vs. 23 taking the place of vs. 18, the grammar of the next verse (19) is saved. Vs. 23 (19) was put at the end for two reasons. The word in vs. 22, יִאֲשְׁמֶוּ, suggested to some reader that the proper place for this פ distich was behind vs. 22, inasmuch as it contained the antithetical description of the fate of the God-fearing. This left the פ in the body of the psalm open. Of "unattached" distichs there was no lack. Ps. 33 is a collection of such. Postscripts to psalms and prophetic chapters prove the abundance of material of this order. As the ז distich mentioned the eyes, and (see our emendation above) vs. 5, in which the "eyes" also are quoted, was followed by vs. 6 speaking of the "face," the introduction of a line about the "face" suggested itself most readily. This intercalation of vs. 17 supports indirectly the emendations proposed here.

The dislike of the (later) Jews to have a biblical passage end with minatory expressions, to which Baethgen, "Psalmen" in Nowack's *HC.*, calls attention (*ad locum*), contributed toward fixing the reading of the psalm in the form in which the Massoretic text has it. (See also Grimm, *Liturgical Appendixes*, p. 8.)

The psalm being undoubtedly of a very late date, the suggestion to read for כפירים, in vs. 11, the Aramaic כפריים "heretics" (Duhm) is very brilliant. But, as remarked, with the exception of the ח lines, no reference is made to the evil-doers. The traditional reading is certainly more poetic. The translation of רשו presents difficulties. Is it not possible that in it is hidden some (corrupted) verb for *crying* out? "The ravens that cry" for food (Ps. 147:9) is a familiar figure of speech. Job 2:10 has the "outcry" of the lion, שאנת אריה, as the prelude to the animal's perishing from lack of prey. Amos 3:4 utilizes the same illustration. If רשו in the meaning of "to lack (food)" is inadmissible (Duhm), is it not better to correct into ישאנו, a correction by no means violent, than to operate with the Aramaic כפריים?